

KENTUCKY HIGHWAY PROGRAM

by

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As I look back on my first year of service as Commissioner of Highways, it seems to me perhaps the nicest thing that has happened to me in that time is summed up in this salutation: "My Friends". Looking around the room I see a few very familiar faces, the faces of friends that pre-date December 13, 1967. I see a great many more faces, people I now call friends, people I did not know when I took on the responsibilities of this job. I will confess there are quite a few faces I still do not recognize but I assure you that if you are interested in Kentucky's highway programs, you are a friend of mine and I am yours.

We are friends even though our acquaintance is not yet formalized. An old friend of mine up in Johnson County once described this degree of familiarity most aptly. I wanted to introduce this elderly gentleman to a newcomer in Paintsville so, to make sure the formality had not already taken place, I asked, "Do you know him?"

"Well", the old-timer replied, "We've howdie'd but we ain't shook."

To everyone of you here present I now say, "Howdy". Let's complete the transaction sometime today. Let's shake hands. Then we can say, "We have howdie'd and shook."

Now give me about fifteen minutes, more or less, of your time. Let me discuss Kentucky's highway programs. I believe it's fair to say that the objective of the Department of Highways since it was organized in 1912 has been to provide the people of Kentucky with the best highway system they could afford. Progress has not always come smoothly or easily. There have been times that were particularly productive and others that were not. Although we have not yet achieved a totally satisfactory highway system, we have come a long way.

The major undertaking of the Department of Highways since I became Commissioner and during Governor Nunn's Administration results from authorization of four new toll roads expected to cost \$374 million. The four parkways, now in preparatory stages, will stretch 254 miles, from Henderson in the west to Hazard in the east. The Audubon Parkway will reach from Henderson to Owensboro. A second road will connect Owensboro with Bowling Green. Then another will run from Bowling Green to Somerset and, after a short gap, the Daniel Boone Parkway will resume at London and extend to Hazard.

Because this decision of the Kentucky Turnpike Authority and the roads themselves have received substantial publicity throughout the Commonwealth, I will not comment in greater detail except to remind you that these are developmental highways. Projected traffic on any one of them is not expected to pay-off the bonds of the Turnpike Authority by which construction will be financed. These highways are intended to open doors of opportunity to sections of the Commonwealth that need this help if they are to achieve and sustain a healthy local economy. Since these roads are not expected to pay their own way they must be subsidized by the Department of Highways through the General Road Fund. Although the decision to build them has been criticized in some quarters, it represents a positive effort by this Administration to contribute to the prosperity, the safety and the convenience of many Kentuckians.

When the proposition was put to the Kentucky Turnpike Authority, of which I am a member, I responded with a hearty "yes". A few years from now most Kentuckians probably will not remember Bill Hazelrigg or what he had to do with these highways but they will, I believe, recognize them as splendid monuments to the Administration of Governor Louie Nunn.

Another major accomplishment of this Administration is the enhanced County Road Aid Program. I am sure this program is very familiar to most county officials present today. The County Road Aid Program was, until this year, financed with an annual appropriation of \$10 million. During last year's gubernatorial campaign, Governor Nunn promised the appropriation would be raised substantially and it has been. We are operating the program on \$12 million this year and next year the appropriation will go to \$13 million. We all concede State aid is a long way from providing for all needs of county roads but next year will find Kentucky's rural citizens 30 percent better off than they were last year in this respect.

During this year before the end of 1968 we will open the last major segment of Interstate 65. This interstate route, running from Louisville to the Tennessee border and beyond to Nashville, will be the first interstate highway completed in Kentucky. In saying this I take some slight poetic license. There is a two-mile section at the Tennessee line which will be put into service late next year when the adjoining Tennessee section is ready to open.

During 1968 highway construction contracts are expected to total \$120 million. Greater revenue to the General Road Fund, resulting from new tax rates, now allows the Department of Highways to match Federal aid for primary, secondary and urban routes, the "A-B-C Roads", without using bond funds. This, we expect, will leave enough in the 1965-authorized bond issue to provide matching money for the remainder of the Interstate System and the Appalachian Program as presently funded.

The Department's housing is being improved. We opened a new Materials Testing Laboratory in Frankfort this year and started or completed construction of 37 new buildings.

While these are only highlights, I trust they provide assurance that the Department of Highways is still in hot pursuit of its lasting objective, the best road system Kentucky can afford. In fact, if I were to choose a text for these remarks, I might illustrate the goal we aim for by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "Every valley shall be exhalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." You understand our goal is still far-off. And, if I were to select a text, it would probably have to be taken from some regulation of the Department of Transportation, the gospel according to Saint Alan Boyd.

I mention the name of the Secretary of Transportation partly in jest and partly in earnest because, as all of us should know, the programs of the Kentucky Department of Highways are to a substantial degree what Washington decides they will be. This year, 1968, about three dollars out of every four spent on highway construction in Kentucky involve Federal aid. Each project was scheduled when Federal funds were released. Each was located and designed, right-of-way was acquired and construction let and accomplished in the way prescribed by Federal authorities.

In this desirable? Let me say, first of all, I am not one of those who bewail every activity of the Federal Government - outside the Post Office or the Mint. I recognize that most of Kentucky's road programs could not exist without Federal aid and I am not unrealistic enough to expect the national government to send blank checks to Frankfort with their only instruction being "to do good". I think the Government's contribution to road programs, beyond the fat Federal billfold, is substantial. For one thing, I heartily endorse the value of national standards, the assurance that major roads throughout the county will have a common quality. Further, I believe the all-seeing eyes of Federal auditors and congressional committees serve a most useful purpose, helping to protect the American taxpayer from occasional sticky fingers that may be encountered at any level of governmental activity.

These are the good things to be said for the Federal-State partnership in highway programs. The great fault many of us find in this arrangement is the deterioration of the partnership that has taken place in the recent past. Partly through default at the State level but substantially because of hyper-aggressiveness in the new Department of Transportation, the partnership has become very one-sided. What was once an arrangement between equals has now established itself with one very senior partner and one very junior. All too frequently the junior partner, the State highway department, learns about business that concerns him from statements of the senior partner in the daily press.

It is unfortunate when decisions are made unilaterally. It is a disaster when they defeat the primary purpose of the partnership, a sound highway construction program moving steadily to a positive goal. I cite the arbitrary moratoriums we have experienced in the release of Federal aid that have been decreed by the current Administration. I do not intend to take up your time rehashing all the arguments we, the States, have used to oppose these "cut-backs". I will say, most State highway administrators consider them ill-advised and their effects disruptive. Highway programs are simply too big, too ponderous, to be turned on and off - like a spigot - without substantial damage to their efficiency and effectiveness.

Further, as a highway administrator, I must quarrel with the elaboration of standards imposed on us. I am convinced the various State highway departments are best able to determine the needs of their areas and their people, although, again, I heartily concur in the establishment of Federal minimum standards. I emphasize the word minimum. I do not believe Federal regulations should establish an optimum condition as the present standards attempt to do.

While standards are so high and Federal review so careful, it is inevitable there will be substantial bureaucratic delays while every decision traces its way through the State and Federal labyrinth. The remoteness of Washington and the accumulation of so much authority at that point can only result in delayed highway programs, expensive highway projects, mistaken highway goals.

These are problems that deserve the serious consideration of the President, the Congress and all Federal officials involved with highway programs. I do not include State highway officials because I believe they are already concerned - alarmed - by the present state of affairs. Most all of them would agree with me that changes should be made.

We should move to restore the Federal-State partnership as it was prior to creation of the Department of Transportation. We would have the Federal government return to State governments substantial control over highway programs, always with minimum restrictions to insure a reasonable degree of uniformity in highway standards and to protect the taxpayers' dollars.

In return the States should move aggressively to clear up those problem areas which have, at least to some degree, invited aggressiveness at the Federal level. State highway departments need to become more sensitive to public needs and wishes, particularly in urban areas. They need to consider more carefully the relationships of highways to the whole community, not just the technical problem of allowing a vehicle to move from this point to that, at the greatest speed, with greatest safety. They need to escape the prison of their own bureaucracies, become quicker to recognize problems and more responsive in dealing with them.

A phrase has been used in Washington recently and, if we can agree on a definition, I can accept it as my own point-of-view. The phrase is "creative federalism". I understand it to mean a restoration of that relationship which State government once had with Federal government, at least in the highway program; then, using the partnership concept as a base, to reach out and grasp and deal with the problems that disturb us. I am hopeful this will come about soon. We will have a new Administration in Washington. I believe we can expect from it not only fresh faces but fresh approaches. I hope the new Secretary of Transportation will be one who has some background in highway programs, one who recognizes that transportation problems of various sections of the country, the various States of the union, are not necessarily identical, and one who is willing to assign the States a substantially expanded role in identifying and dealing with their traffic needs.

Perhaps the new Administration will consider these recommendations:

The Interstate System should be completed at the earliest possible time without any diversion of Highway Trust Funds to other transportation modes. This is the primary purpose of the fund's existence as originally stated. I believe its commitment to the American people should be met.

I urge the new Administration to fund the Appalachian Program completely. As you may remember, the first estimate of the total cost of this program was \$2.2 billion. The most recent estimate has risen to \$3.6 billion, in part from higher design standards and in part from inflated costs. To finish this system, Congress should authorize additional Federal participation of \$1 billion at least. In making this request the Commonwealth can offer as evidence of our good faith the commitment we have already made to developmental roads in Appalachia, using our own funds. The Mountain Parkway has now been in service five years. It cost Kentuckians \$68 million. The newly authorized Turnpike Program includes the Daniel Boone Parkway and this is expected to cost \$128 million. In Appalachia, Kentucky has given meaning to "creative federalism".

Finally, I propose that when the Interstate System is completed, the Highway Trust Fund turn its attention and benefits to Primary, Secondary and Urban Roads, where massive needs are compounding daily. The time cannot come too soon.

To summarize, I urge that Kentucky and all the other States be allowed to resume a full partnership in highway programs, that Federal aid be released at orderly intervals in predictable amounts, that Federal regulations and standards provide a base for our programs, rather than obstacles, and that Federal officials be or become sympathetic to this point-of-view. I urge that the Appalachian Program be fully funded, that the Interstate System be pushed to completion as quickly as the Trust Fund will allow, and that the fund's next objective be primarily the "A-B-C" System.